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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000514

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SUBJECT: CZECH ENTER DEBATE ON EU CHINA ARMS EMBARGO

Classified By: Political Officer Kimberly C. Krhounek, for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. The Czech Republic is beginning to speak out against the immediate removal of the EU China arms embargo. Growing European debate over the timing and modalities of any removal of the embargo is allowing the Czechs to play a more active role in the debate and, the Czechs believe, strengthening the hand of countries such as the Czech Republic which are reluctant to lift the embargo now. MFA officials report the Czechs will insist on improvements in China's human rights record and a "strategic dialogue" with other countries before a decision is made. They also state that even if the embargo were lifted, the scale of Chinese human rights abuses would prevent the Czech Republic from exporting any weapons to China. On the other hand, MFA officials, citing divisions within the government, remain wary of standing alone against an EU consensus to lift the embargo. The future Czech stance will depend in part on the composition of the next Czech government. End summary.

12. (C) Jana Hybaskova, Czech MEP and a staunch supporter of USG foreign policies, told Poloff April 4 that she was very pleased with the two EP resolutions recently passed opposing EU plans to lift the embargo, stating that it was a signal to many EU governments that their publics do not support this step. The EPP-ED party grouping in the EP has been at the forefront of these efforts, but it has its own internal divisions. Hybaskova said that the large German CDU party remains in favor of the lift, and her fellow Czech MEPs from the ODS party refuse to play an active role in the debate, although MEP Jan Zahradil claims that they are in favor of maintaining the current embargo. The attitude of the ODS MEPs reflects the broader, more cautious Czech approach to this issue within the EU, where we are repeatedly assured that they are in agreement with US policy, but are unwilling to take a strong stance in opposition to other members.

13. (C) In an April 6 meeting with Acting Assistant Secretary of Defense Mira Ricardel, Czech Deputy Foreign Minister for Security Policy Jan Winkler said that whatever decision the EU makes about the China arms embargo, "we have no intention of supplying China with arms." Winkler added that he had been in Japan recently where he encouraged his hosts to speak out in Brussels. Winkler argued that the issue is "too often seen in the EU as one of concern only to the Americans."

14. (C) Czech MFA Political Director Martin Povejsil, in an April 8 meeting with DCM, said that the consensus is that the embargo will not be lifted during the Luxembourg presidency. He said this new breathing space has permitted the Czech Republic and others with concerns about the embargo to become more active. He laid out the markers that the CR would like to see before any decision is taken; namely improvement in the Chinese human rights record and a "strategic dialogue" with other interested countries, to include discussion about the actual mechanisms that would regulate EU exports absent the embargo. According to Povejsil, the Czechs believe this dialogue should take place within existing EU mechanisms (Solana's office and the EU Presidency) rather than through some special purpose multilateral forum, and should be conducted at a minimum with the U.S., Japan, Australia and South Korea; within the USG context, the Czechs would like to see it encompass both Congress and the Administration. Povejsil claimed that several other EU countries were prepared to join the GOCR in holding the EU to these criteria, but did not identify them. Having other countries shore up the Czech position will be determinative and allow the Czech Republic to be more pro-active on this issue in EU fora. He described the Czech government to date as being divided on the question of the arms embargo, meaning there was no chance that the CR would have had the authority to take a view contrary to EU consensus (as they did, for instance, earlier this year on EU Cuba policy). Finally, Povejsil stated that, absent significant improvements in China's human rights record, the CR would not permit any weapons exports regardless of the status of the embargo.

15. (C) In a still unpublished editorial on the arms embargo, written as his name rose to the top of the list of candidates to replace current Prime Minister Stanislav Gross, Czech EU Ambassador Jan Kohout states that the Czechs will insist on the release of political prisoners from Tiananmen Square and Chinese ratification of the convention on civil and political rights as prerequisites for the embargo to be lifted. He

also argues that allies must be consulted.

16. (C) Comment. The message we are hearing from the Czechs is consistent: while there are divisions within the government on the question, the GOCR does not support lifting the embargo; but nor do they have the will or, they believe, the ability to stop it; that said, they will take full advantage of the lull in movement towards lifting the embargo to argue for steps that promote their traditional emphasis on human rights and preserving transatlantic ties. The latter sentiments are clearly most powerful at the MFA. The ongoing efforts to create a new cabinet will have an impact: the choice of a career diplomat like Jan Kohout as Prime Minister will reinforce these trends; however if a hardliner like Jan Kavan (who studied in Beijing in the 1970s) took over the Foreign Ministry, the Czech position could shift. For now, we expect the Czechs will try to speak out ever more loudly in favor of a process that leads to lifting of the embargo only when the conditions are right. End Comment.  
HILLAS